

BLAISE PASCAL IN THE PERIOD 1789-1815.
A LITERARY STUDY

BY
BETTY JANE EILERTSEN
B.A., Russell Sage College, 1940
M.A., University of Wisconsin, 1941

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
FRENCH IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
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FOREWORD

The value of Pascal's contributions to philosophy, science, religion and literature has been a controversial subject since the seventeenth century. The history of the change in attitude toward Pascal from the seventeenth century into the twentieth century has already been outlined by Bernard Amoudru in his book entitled *Des "Pascalins" aux "pascalisants."* *La Vie posthume des "Pensées"* (Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1936). The work shows the shifting evaluation of the *Pensées* from the polite appreciation of the seventeenth century to the hostility of the eighteenth century, the frenzied admiration and neurasthenic interpretations of the nineteenth century and, finally, the more objective and comprehensive attitude of the twentieth century. The general subject has thus been outlined.

This study is an attempt to narrow the field and to observe in more detail one phase of the curious history of the *Pensées*. The "romantic" Pascal has been discussed to some extent but as yet little has been said of the entrance of the "romantic" Pascal into French literature. It was during the period 1789-1815 that the main characteristics of the "romantic" Pascal were defined and accepted.

The various divisions of the study show the changes in the interpretation of the *Pensées* during this period, resulting in the acceptance of the *Pensées* as a work in keeping with the spirit and ideals of the early nineteenth century. The first chapter, the "Influence of Eighteenth-Century Opinion of Pascal in the Period 1789-1815," is a description of Pascal at the close of the eighteenth century, when changing standards required a re-evaluation of the contributions of the past and resulted in a discussion of the validity of Voltaire's observances on Pascal.

The second chapter, the "Reputation of Pascal as a Port-Royalist," indicates the interest of the period in Pascal as a Jansenist and his position in respect to that of his Jansenist contemporaries. The "Reputation of Pascal as a 'Classicist'" notes the extent to which Pascal was considered an exponent of traditional classic ideals. The fourth chapter, "General Interest in Pascal in Pre-romantic Circles," marks the Pascal of the nineteenth century. The fifth chapter, the "Romantic Pascal in the Literature and Criticism of Pascal from 1789 to 1815," shows the actual influence of Pascal upon those writers generally considered contributors to romantic literature.

In the entire work, an effort has been made to portray Pascal, not as he was, but as he appeared to the world of 1789-1815. Thus it has been irrelevant to the purpose of this study to present in any detail the real Pascal. On the other hand, it is hoped that this study will indicate the extent to which the period presented a Pascal who was accepted by the literary world of 1789-1815 and whose ideals were more in keeping with the literature of the future than with that of the past.

The term "classic" is used in its popular sense since, during the period 1789-1815, neither "classicism" nor "classic" was defined carefully. Both words are used in speaking of writers whose works are in keeping with the ideals of the latter part of the seventeenth century or who can be associated with the idols of the eighteenth century.

The definition of "romantic" is likely to be purely subjective on the part of the person who formulates the definition. The definition of the romantic ideal given by Paul Bourget in 1882 is admirably suited to our purpose since it employs Pascal's own term, "disproportion": "L'idéal romantique . . . non seulement conduit l'homme à être en disproportion avec son milieu, mais il le met en disproportion avec lui-même." (Cited by M. Souriau. *Histoire du romantisme en France*. Paris: Editions Spes, 1927. I, 1, xxvii.) The most outstanding general characteristic thus becomes "disproportion" or even "conflict." The conflict exists in all human activities. It is particularly noticeable in religion and

in the attempts to define man's position in respect to the universe. The conception of the romantic Pascal is therefore separated into two main divisions: Pascal's contributions to the romantic religion and to the romantic genius.

"Pre-romantic" is a term designating the writers of the period 1789-1815 in whose works were found the neurasthenic qualities usually associated with the "disproportion" of the romantics. Pascal had considered man's "disproportion" a quality found in "L'homme sans Dieu." The pre-romantic writers ignored this qualification and interpreted Pascal's "Disproportion de l'homme" as a discussion of man in general and of Pascal himself in particular. This is the moment in which the "romantic" Pascal was born.

A brief summary of the contributions of the most important literary figures in this study indicates the conclusions which one may draw regarding the reputation of Pascal in the period 1789-1815.

INFLUENCE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY OPINION OF PASCAL IN THE PERIOD 1789-1815

Voltaire's overemphasis upon the non-rationalistic qualities of Pascal popularized Pascal as a kindred spirit among pre-romantic writers. The amount and quality of Voltaire's criticism convinced them that Pascal was his strongest and most worthy opponent. Pascal's reputation was thus related to the reaction against Voltaire. In making Pascal the exponent of the ideas to which he was most opposed, Voltaire contributed to the formation of the conception of the romantic Pascal. Because Voltaire had emphasized only a small part of Pascal's work, however, the *Pensées* were not appreciated fully.

Condorcet, disciple of Voltaire, continued the work of his master in his discussion of the non-rational quality of the *Pensées*, but his criticism of the inaccuracy of the Port-Royal edition of the *Pensées* and his interest in a new and more complete edition are worthwhile contributions to a better understanding and appreciation of Pascal. These two factors contributed to the defeat of Voltaire and made Pascal an even more important literary figure.

The criticism of the Citoyen Naigeon is characteristic of the moment in French history when the Revolution of 1789 produced men who objected to traditional religions. Pascal was momentarily the victim of atheistic thought and was still limited to the position accorded him by Voltaire and Condorcet.

Joseph de Maistre, making a distinction between the Pascal of the *Provinciales* and the Pascal of the *Pensées*, contributed to the defeat of the "philosophes" by his condemnation of Condorcet and Voltaire's editions of the work of Pascal as two of the "énormités" of the eighteenth century and by his suggestion that Pascal be recognized as one of France's greatest writers.

LaHarpe deserted his former master, Voltaire, and denounced his criticism of Pascal as unjustifiable, ineffective, partial and incomplete.

Maine de Biran questioned the motives of Voltaire and Condorcet, considering their criticism of Pascal examples of the pettiness and childishness of the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Pascal's rôle was thus made even more important in the reaction against the eighteenth century.

The spiritual revival of the last years of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century offered a Pascal considered more sympathetically by Mme de Genlis, by Ballanche, and by writers of the *Journal des Débats* and the *Mercur de France*, particularly Chateaubriand, Fontanes and Fiévée, who placed the ideas of Voltaire in opposition to those of Pascal and defended the latter against Roederer and Fouché. The eighteenth century suffered in comparison with the seventeenth century. The literature of the latter century rapidly became identified with the ideals of the early nineteenth century. This period is one of severe attack on Voltaire, not only for his criticism of Pascal, but for his whole system of philosophy. His *Remarques sur les Pensées de Pascal* become the symbol of everything to which literary leaders of the pre-romantic group were opposed. Roederer, Fouché, Ginguené and Palissot, however, continued their support of Voltaire as a philosopher. There was no compromise between the conflicting schools of thought. Thus Pascal's defenders did not succeed in destroying completely the Pascal of Voltaire and Condorcet.

REPUTATION OF PASCAL AS A PORT-ROYALIST

Henri Grégoire and Joseph de Maistre figure most prominently in the consideration of Pascal's position as a Jansenist. Their opinions, when supported by those of Chateaubriand, M.-J. Chénier and Chamfort, indicate Pascal's reputation in the period 1789-1815 in relation to that of prominent Jansenists of his own day. There are two conclusions which may be drawn from this study. Some writers of the period felt that Pascal was a typical Port-Royalist, formed by the school and an expression of it. Others believed that Pascal was far superior to the Arnaulds, the Nicoles and the Hamons who had lapsed into obscurity in literary circles. Pascal's most severe critics were De Maistre, Picot and Donaudi, who opposed him primarily on the ground of his Jansenist leanings. Grégoire, on the other hand, admired Pascal, not only as a representative of the religious, educational and cultural ideals of Port-Royal, but also as a classic stylist in his own right. De Maistre criticized Pascal as a Jansenist who had written against the Jesuits in his *Lettres provinciales*, preventing unity within the Catholic Church. He attacked Pascal by attempting to destroy the influence of Port-Royal and its group of supporters, stating that Port-Royal weakened the talents of writers who might have been useful in religion and philosophy. His final conclusion, none the less, was that Pascal merited the reputation of greatness, and he agreed with Grégoire that Pascal's name should be found at the head of the list of Port-Royal writers. De Maistre understood and appreciated the basis of Pascal's desire to write an apology of Christianity and sympathized with such problems as those of the heart against the mind, but still felt that Pascal departed too frequently from the cardinal virtue of obeying the laws of order and authority. In spite of this, he felt that Pascal's philosophy had not been equaled in the eighteenth century.

Pascal and Port-Royal fortunately found other supporters in the circle of friends of Chateaubriand. Those who expressed distinct admiration for both were Chateaubriand himself, Mme de Beaumont, Joubert and Chamfort. Representatives of the Jansenist faith were found in the Pasquier, Molé and Barante families, which were influential in Chateaubriand's group.

Bonald followed Joseph de Maistre in his reverence for tradition but he considered Pascal an artist superior to Voltaire and appreciated his contribution to the perfecting of French prose. Maine de Biran showed a strong antagonism toward Pascal in the period 1789-1815, but by 1823 he had arrived at many of Pascal's conclusions, some of which had their origins in Jansenism. Marie-Joseph Chénier, like Bonald, appreciated Pascal's contributions to French prose in his *Lettres provinciales*.

REPUTATION OF PASCAL AS A 'CLASSICIST'

The study of the reputation of Pascal in 1789-1815 involves discussion of his contributions as a classicist. Pascal was considered a classicist by his readers of 1789 largely because of the Port-Royal edition of the *Pensées*, in which the form and style were altered in an effort to eliminate elements which were not in keeping with the classic tradition of Port-Royal. The *Pensées* thus edited were not only more orthodox from the religious standpoint that Pascal had made them, but more faithful to the classic ideal of order, clarity, simplicity in style and in expression, and objectivity. The alterations in the style of the *Pensées* which were discussed in this study show the extent to which Port-Royal produced an impression of abstraction and rigidity in form and style which one associates with Port-Royal's conception of classicism rather than with Pascal. Thus the more conservative literary world of 1789-1815 could appreciate Pascal as a master of the literary technique of the seventeenth century. During the revival of the classicism of the seventeenth century in the period 1789-1815, Pascal's work emerged as representative of the best in sound classic tradition, chiefly as a result of the discussions of classicism and classic writers in the *Journal des Débats* and the *Mercure de France*. Roederer and Fouché, in this respect also represent the opposition to Pascal, since the general question of the superiority of the classicism of the seventeenth century to that of the eighteenth century involved the question of the superiority of Pascal to Voltaire. Roederer succeeded in destroying the freedom of the press after 1805. A group had been formed about 1800 to support the cause of the seventeenth century. Chateaubriand was the leader of this group which was determined to reintroduce the sane literary doctrine

of the seventeenth century. Those who supported the movement in the journals of the period were LaHarpe, Fontanes, Bonald, the Abbé de Vauxcelles, Gueneau de Mussy, Dussault, Feletz, Fiévée, Saint Victor, Boissonada, Geoffroy, and the Abbé de Boulogne. In the literature of the period we find admiring references to the classic taste of Pascal by Mme de Charrière, LaHarpe, Marie-Joseph Chénier, Joseph de Maistre, Bonald, Mme de Staël and Paul-Louis Courier. Chateaubriand's group approached the classicism of Pascal from a different point of view. Adherence to classic rules was not their criterion. Their praise for Pascal was based partly upon their hostility to the eighteenth-century conception of classicism and was, in many cases, a purely emotional reaction in which all writers of the seventeenth century appeared as superior beings. Ballanche, like Mme de Staël, associated Pascal with the Christian inspiration of seventeenth-century literature. Fontanes was more conscious of the true nature of classicism, which he admired greatly. He was one of the few to appreciate the *Pensées* as a classic masterpiece in its combination of a natural, simple, precise style with the qualities of the sublime and the naïve. Most other writers had based their discussions of the classicism of Pascal upon the *Lettres provinciales*. Fontanes also appreciated Pascal as a moralist who fulfilled the best in the classic genius but who transcended his century.

To Chateaubriand, Pascal was the Christian philosopher of the seventeenth century whose *Pensées* had been misinterpreted by the eighteenth century. His appreciation of Pascal the classicist was largely confined to a sympathy for his religious, moral and political scruples, although he admired the simple, natural style which he contrasted with the "style recherché" developed by the eighteenth century. Joubert's judgment was more objective. He limited himself to respectful admiration of Pascal's work, noting, however, his dependence upon Montaigne. Nodier followed Joubert by developing the subject of Pascal's debt to Montaigne, insisting that Pascal did not merit a reputation for originality. Since originality was not a necessary quality of literature of the seventeenth century, one may assume that any emphasis upon originality is romantic in origin. Thus, at the

end of the period, Pascal, in spite of the incorporation of the *Pensées* into the pre-romantic movement, was still considered a classicist from the point of view of style.

GENERAL INTEREST OF THE PRE-ROMANTIC GROUP

IN PASCAL FROM 1789 TO 1815

Pascal's rôle in the pre-romantic movement has been considered first from the point of view of the general interest in his work in pre-romantic circles. One of the most important groups is that of Lamennais. Lamennais' literary friends met and discussed Pascal frequently at the home of his uncle, Robert des Saudrais, in the first years of the period 1789-1815. There is also interest in Pascal among the "émigrés" of the Revolutionary period. Rivarol, Chênedollé and Adrien de Lezay are the foremost examples of those who are known to have continued to read Pascal abroad.

Mme de Staël developed romantic interest in Pascal by associating the writers of the seventeenth century with German philosophy and by recognizing Pascal as a philosopher of the heart.

The interest in Pascal of the group which met at the home of Pauline de Beaumont at the turn of the century is the most important in the development of the romantic Pascal. The most significant written criticism of the group is found in the work of Chateaubriand, Joubert and Chênedollé. The preparation for the acceptance of Pascal as a literary figure, however, was made by Ballanche in 1801 in his *Du Sentiment considéré dans ses rapports avec la littérature et les arts*. This work, which preceded the *Génie du christianisme*, expressed many of the ideas to be found in it. By making Pascal one of the models of French "sentiment," Ballanche launched him as a model for nineteenth-century literature. Chateaubriand's interest in Pascal was even greater in that he considered himself the continuer of Pascal in his apology of Christianity. He borrowed directly from Ballanche but was original in expressing his conception of the ideas of Pascal in the style of the nineteenth century, attempting to make the new apology more attractive from a literary and artistic point of view. At this moment, Pascal became an inspiration in nineteenth century literature.

THE ROMANTIC PASCAL IN THE LITERATURE AND CRITICISM OF PASCAL FROM 1789 TO 1815

The romantic Pascal in the literature and criticism of Pascal from 1789 to 1815 has been studied most extensively in the work of Ballanche, Chateaubriand, Chênedollé, Maine de Biran and Charles Nodier. From the point of view of religion, it has been shown that the romantic Pascal appeared in the conception of the religion of the heart because of his acceptance of the doctrine of revelation and his objection to rational processes as the only basis for conclusions. Pascal's reasons of the heart became confused with nineteenth-century "sentiment." Pascal's idea that Christianity best explains the nature of man was accepted enthusiastically by Ballanche and Chateaubriand and became a romantic, poetic symbol for the mysterious element in the Christian religion. It was emphasized in the romantic longing, restlessness and tragic sense of futility. Religion as a refuge, inspired by romantic escapism, was found in Pascal's austerity and became a romantic affectation, an expression of the ego. The "illustre solitaire de Port-Royal" inspires Ballanche in his *Du Sentiment . . .*, *La Grande Chartreuse*, *Les Fragments* and *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme*, and found expression in *Le Génie . . .* of Chateaubriand.

The romantic genius is defined in this study in terms of the romantic ego, romantic subjectivity, the "mal du siècle," romantic escapism, glorification of the imagination, the dualism of human nature, the sense of the mysterious, misanthropy and the limitations of science.

Romantic egotism was displayed in a pride in personal suffering and in a realization of weaknesses which produced the solitary romantic genius, who found himself superior to his environment and incapable of achieving any earthly satisfaction. Pascal's "roseau pensant" was interpreted as a creature who was limited in his power but fully conscious of his limitations and therefore superior because of a consciousness of self. This figure was exaggerated by the romantic minds of Ballanche, Chateaubriand and Chênedollé.

Subjectivity, an interpretation of life from the individual point of view, was developed as a result of the romantic realization that man cannot find the absolute. This idea was derived partly from Pascal, who stressed the fact that the exact sciences did not offer a complete explanation of the source of life. Pascal was presented as an "âme sensible" from whom reason or any other stabilizing force was completely remote. Inquietude, inconstancy and "ennui" offer the individual's instinct rather than reason as the motivation for behavior.

It is in the "mal du siècle" that one finds the greatest source of the romantic Pascal. His emphasis upon the "misères de l'homme" was associated with the melancholy of the early nineteenth century. Pascal's observations on the "néant" and the "infini" were the most frequently quoted of all *Pensées*. His acceptance of the impossibility of understanding absolute reality made it imperative for him to put all his faith in God. The romantic Pascal was interpreted as a creature tormented by doubt, inquietude and uncertainty, constantly seeking but never finding peace and happiness. Themes of sorrow and disillusionment found in the work of Ballanche, Chateaubriand, Chênedollé, Maine de Biran and Nodier are reënforced by quotations from the *Pensées*. Writers of the period 1789-1815 are interested far more in the actual condition of man than in the implication in Pascal's attempt to prove the necessity of God.

Pascal's discussions of man's urge to escape the disappointments of life which finds an outlet in vain pursuits is dramatized by the romantic mind. Pascal had assumed that man found peace in God. The romantics emphasized man's hopeless condition again, picturing life as a yawning abyss into which are cast all human achievements, producing sensations of terror, solitude and futility. Ballanche, Chateaubriand and Nodier suggest retreat from the world as a solution—a retreat in which man gives himself up completely to his disappointment. Maine de Biran describes man's urge to escape living but refuses to accept the solution of the romantic mind.

The overemphasis upon purely emotional reactions and upon fantasy caused the pre-romantic group to confuse the rôle which Pascal gave to the heart with the romantic glorification of im-

agination. Where Pascal had admitted the sphere of reason, the romantic mind interpreted him as admitting as deciding factors instinct of the heart. "Non-rational" becomes "irrational." Bal-
lanche interprets it as "sentiment," the motivating force of the literature of the future, and supports his claims by quoting from the *Pensées*. He and Chateaubriand consider most important the imaginative qualities of the *Pensées* and in this respect find Pascal a kindred spirit.

Pascal's *Pensées* on the "ange" and the "bête" in man were interpreted according to the romantic emphasis upon the dualism of human nature. Where Pascal had considered both aspects of man's nature in order to explain man's aspirations toward a higher goal in spite of his weaknesses, the romantic temperament slighted the moral issues and emphasized the dramatic conflict resulting from the combination of good and evil in an individual. Pascal's restraint was lost, and the "bête" in man overshadowed the "ange."

The sense of the mysterious found in the *Pensées* in Pascal's limitation of reason impressed upon the romantic mind the fundamental antagonism between reason and faith. This effect was heightened by Pascal's insistence upon original sin, his recourse to the "ordo caritatis" and the picture of man lost between the "néant" and the "infini." Man and the world became even more mysterious and inexplicable to the romantic mind. Chateaubriand in particular appreciated obscurity and reveled in a sensuous enjoyment of the mysterious. In his mind, the feeling became associated with a mystic, mysterious sense of awe at the wonders of the universe.

Misanthropy is found in the romantic love of solitude. The accusations of the eighteenth century had represented Pascal as scorning earthly attachments. Where Pascal had suggested that the glory of God remain the most important concern in the life of man, the romantic mind interpreted his attitude as scorn for his fellowmen. Bal-
lanche was horrified by the attitude of distrust which he attributed to Pascal.

The scientific Pascal, presented by Condorcet and Bossut, received some attention in the period, chiefly in Jacques Delille's *Trois Règnes de la nature* (1808) but Pascal's conception of the

limits of science was emphasized. Interpreted by Ballanche and Chateaubriand, this becomes a contempt for the abstract sciences which Pascal had never had. His arguments were used primarily against the eighteenth century for the glory of the nineteenth in the reaction against materialism.

CONCLUSION

In this study, one may trace the steady progress of Pascal as an inspiration for the literature of the nineteenth century, and note the greater respect in which he and his work were held during the period 1789-1815. It would be unjust, however, to say that this period understood him better than the eighteenth century. It is much more correct to say that the pre-romantic writers "felt" that they understood him better. One may also say that they showed no hesitation in attributing to him ideas which he did not possess and displayed great freedom in using his name as an authority for ideas intended to produce a reaction against the philosophy and literature of the eighteenth century. In this way, the *Pensées* became closely associated with the literature of the period 1789-1815. As a result of the careful selection of *Pensées* which seemed to be in keeping with the new spirit, the Pascal of 1789-1815 became predominantly romantic in spirit and was thus transmitted to the great romantic generation which followed.

VITA

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